

**The Consulate General of the Republic of Hungary in Los Angeles paid tribute to the Great Hungarian American Cinematographer, László Kovács, at a Film Seminar on October 15, 2007 at 3.30pm at Chaplin Theatre – Raleigh Studios, 5300 Melrose Ave, Hollywood, CA 90038. The event, “In memory of László Kovács” was organized with a great public attention.**

**As a result of the success of the Seminar, the Consulate General had the intention to publish the full text of all what could be heard on October 15, 2007 at the Chaplin Theatre. We want to dedicate it to the memory of László and to his family, as well to offer it to all those who think that there is a path to follow the example of László Kovács. His life is gone, but his memory stays with us. We will always remember you. László...**

**Los Angeles, January 30, 2008.**

**Balázs Bokor  
Ambassador  
Consul General of the Republic Hungary  
in Los Angeles**

[A full text of an article published in THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER on July 24, 2007.](#)

## **Cinematographer László Kovács dies at 74**

### **Lensed 'Easy Rider,' 'Paper Moon'**

By Carolyn Giardina

July 24, 2007

Internationally acclaimed cinematographer László Kovács, who lensed the landmark cinematic achievement "Easy Rider" and compiled more than 70 credits, has died at his home in Beverly Hills.

Kovács, who died Sunday, was 74. The cause of death was not known as of press time.

One of Hollywood's most influential and respected directors of photography, Kovács lensed "Five Easy Pieces," "Shampoo," "Paper Moon," "New York, New York," "What's Up, Doc?" "Ghost Busters," "My Best Friend's Wedding" and "Miss Congeniality."

"He was one of the great wave of cinematographers in the 1970s who basically changed the way movies had looked up until that time," said Richard Crudo, past president of the American Society of Cinematographers. "His roots were in the low-budget independent world, and he took a lot of that ethic to another level. Years later, he became a master of the high-gloss studio look. But no matter what he did, there was always a tremendous amount of heart in his work.

"He was loved by everyone at the ASC, and there are legions of students and young cinematographers who owe a tremendous debt to László's generosity of spirit."

ASC president Daryn Okada added that Kovács had "incredible generosity to give back -- to students, to other cinematographers and to the ASC. László inspired me to do the same," Okada said. "It is a great loss, not just to cinematographers, but to anyone who has seen the movies he photographed."

The Hungary-born cinematographer never won an Oscar but carried during his career a remarkable story of courage that occurred 50 years ago during his country's revolution.

Kovács was born to Imre and Julianna Kovács and raised on a farm in Hungary when that country was isolated from the Western world, first by the Nazi occupation and later during the Cold War. Kovács was in his final year of school in Budapest when a revolt against the communist regime started on the city streets.

He and his lifelong friend Vilmos Zsigmond -- who also went on to become one of Hollywood's

leading directors of photography -- made the daring decision to document the event for its historic significance. To do this, they borrowed film and a camera from their school, hid the camera in a paper bag with a hole for the lens and recorded the conflict.

The pair then embarked on a dangerous journey during which they carried 30,000 feet of documentary film across the border into Austria. They entered the U.S. as political refugees in 1957.

"As a man I loved him," said Zsigmond, reached in North Carolina where he is shooting the film *Bolder!*, "We always had a great time together."

Their historic film was featured in a CBS documentary narrated by Walter Cronkite.

After working on several smaller films during the 1960s, Kovács was approached by Dennis Hopper in 1969 to film *Easy Rider*. Kovács turned it down, but Hopper was persistent and met with him to act out all the scenes.

"At the end of that meeting, I asked when we could start shooting," Kovács recalled in a 1998 interview with the International Cinematographers Guild. "That's how I happened to shoot *Easy Rider*. We knew it was something special, but none of us realized that it would win awards and become so influential."

The counterculture classic, also starring Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson, was shot during a 12-week journey from Los Angeles to New Orleans, entirely on location.

"That was the style of *Poetic Reality*, basically making movies that look real," Zsigmond said. "The lighting is real, and the people in the theater think they are seeing the real thing."

Kovács worked with many of the leading directors of his time, among them Peter Bogdanovich ("*Targets*," "*Paper Moon*," "*What's Up, Doc?*"), Martin Scorsese ("*New York, New York*," "*The Last Waltz*"), Robert Altman ("*That Cold Day in the Park*") and Bob Rafelson ("*Five Easy Pieces*," "*The King of Marvin Gardens*").

During Kovács' professional career, he was an active member of the ASC, and in 2002, he received the ASC Lifetime Achievement Award, the organization's highest honor.

In 1998, he received two Lifetime Achievement Awards for cinematography: one at the Hawaii International Film Festival and one at CamerImage, the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography, in Torun, Poland.

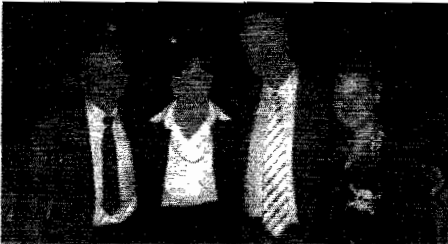
A full text of an article published in THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER on October 16, 2007

## Hollywood focuses on Kovács

### Lenser honored at Raleigh event

By Steve Brennan

Oct 16, 2007



(From left) Vilmos Zsigmond, Audrey Kovács, Ambassador Balazs Bokor and Nadia Kovács

"A hard-working genius" and "a great Hungarian American" was how the late cinematographer László Kovács was described Monday at a tribute to the man and his work in Hollywood. The event was organized by the Consulate General of Hungary in Los Angeles.

Kovács, said Ambassador Balázs Bokor, Consul General of Hungary, was "a witness of the 1956 revolution in Hungary, the 51st anniversary of which we are going to celebrate on October 23. It was a milestone of Hungarian history, bloodily pushed down by the Soviet tanks. He did not plan to escape from Hungary: He and his life-long friend, Vilmos Zsigmond, left the country rescuing the very precious film made by them about the revolutionary events. He put his fingerprint on the history of filmmaking forever."

The event was hosted by Raleigh Studios in the Chaplin Building and included testimonials and tributes from world-renowned Hungarian and U.S. film luminaries, including Oscar-winning cinematographer Zsigmond. Others included cinema journalist Bob Fisher; Steven Lighthill, senior filmmaker in residence at the AFI; Michael Newport, manager, Raleigh Film; Gyula Gazdag, filmmaker and UCLA professor; USC professor Gábor Kálmán; Béla Bunyik, founder and president of the Hungarian Film Festival in Los Angeles; Róbert Gy\_ri, president of the William Fox Film Club; and "56 Drops of Blood" director Attila Bokor. They spoke about their personal experiences with Kovács, on his life achievement and on Hungarian-American film cooperation.

"He was, what we call, a Hungarian American. ... He joined in his life the pantheon of world-famous American film people, among them quite a lot of Hungarians, like some of the founding fathers of Hollywood," said Ambassador Bokor, who was a friend of the cinematographer.

Personal messages from Dennis Hopper and Peter Bogdanovich specially sent for the occasion were read.

Said Hopper, "László was the greatest telephoto operator I know of. He was a great cinematographer. His lighting was quick, fast and complete. We shot 'Easy Rider' in five weeks, going through and shooting in five different states. We used a fast film that had not been used before in feature movies. I would never have been able to make 'Easy Rider' without László and Paul Lewis, my production manager, who brought Mr. Kovács to me. He said, 'This is your man', and he certainly was. My vision for 'Easy Rider' and 'The Last Movie,' both shot by László, was simple, but very complicated. Since I was starring and directing in both films, hand signals were the way we communicated. That's how in the same groove we were. A wonderful, charming, hard-working genius. We are all lucky to have been his friend. He will not be missed, but will be with us forever through his films and our collective memory."

Bogdanovich added, "László Kovács and I did seven pictures together, more than I did with any other cinematographer, and the reason is simple: László was the most versatile director of photography. He could do anything, and he did it with ease and charm and a kind of gracious intensity. It was enormously easy to work with him and always a lot of fun. When I did pictures without him, I always missed him. I miss him now. He was the best."

Among the 70 plus lensing credits for Kovacs, who died July 21, are "Targets," "Five Easy Pieces," "Paper Moon," "Shampoo," "New York, New York," "Ghost Busters," "Mask" and "Miss Congeniality."

A short film on Kovács, directed by Csaba Káel, produced by Béla Bunyik, was screened.

Kovács' widow, Audrey, greeted the audience at the end of the event, thanking them for paying tribute to her husband.

## MEMORIES OF LÁSZLÓ KOVÁCS, ASC

By Bob Fisher

I interviewed Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC for the first time about 30 years ago to talk about *The Deer Hunter*. To be honest, I had no idea that it was destined to become a classic film. He patiently answered my questions, and politely suggested that I should also be writing about another cinematographer. His name was László Kovács, ASC.

I scheduled my first interview with Kovács in 1978. The movie was *F.I.S.T.* I introduced myself and called him Mr. Kovács. He laughed, slapped me on the arm, and said my name is László. I didn't ask any of the questions that I had prepared about how he shot the film. Instead, we spoke about how *they* discovered the right, naturalistic look for the story.

I emphasize *they* because he never used the words "I" or "me." It was always "we." László spoke about his relationships with director Norman Jewison, camera operator Bob Stevens and others on his crew, the costume and production designers, and the AD who got everyone assembled in the right place at the right time for the magic to happen. He also spoke about the actors, including Sylvester Stallone and Rod Steiger. At the end, he smiled and said, "You know, Vilmos is shooting a wonderful film called *The Rose*."

*Easy Rider* was the first film mentioned in almost all obituaries written about László Kovács after the legendary cinematographer died peacefully in his sleep at his Los Angeles home on July 22. No wonder. In a retrospective 2002 commentary, Leonard Maltin proclaimed *Easy Rider* a landmark movie that changed the art of filmmaking.

Critics dubbed Kovács and the directors who collaborated with him during the 1960s as "the American New Wave." They included Dennis Hopper (*Easy Rider*), Bob Rafelson (*Five Easy Pieces*, *The King of Marvin Gardens*), Hal Ashby (*Shampoo*), Martin Scorsese (*New York, New York*, *The Last Waltz*), Peter Bogdanovich, (*Targets*,

*Nickelodeon, Mask, Paper Moon, What's Up, Doc?*) and Robert Altman (*That Cold Day in the Park*).

"I filmed interviews with Dennis Hopper, Bob Rafelson and Peter Bogdanovich for *László and Vilmos*, a documentary that I'm producing," said James Chressanthis, ASC. "They spoke lovingly about László and described him as an artist who improvised and experimented."

In a July 24 interview with NPR, Bogdanovich said that Roger Corman introduced him to László while he was preparing to direct *Targets*, the B movie that was their first co-venture. Bogdanovich said, "He was extraordinarily inventive. ... He could give you anything from the rough edge that we had on *Paper Moon* to the glamorous photography we did on *What's Up, Doc?* Barbra Streisand was very happy ... and hired him for other films."

The story of his life is almost like a fairy tale. Kovács was born on a farm near Cece, a rural Hungarian village some 60 miles from Budapest on May 14, 1933. During his youth, there was a makeshift weekend cinema in the village school auditorium where 16 mm propaganda films from Germany were projected on a bed sheet. László was fascinated with the flickering images that told stories which sparked his imagination about faraway places.

When he was 16, his parents sent him to school in Budapest with instructions to become a doctor or an engineer. Kovács was bored by science and math, so he cut classes and spent his days at local cinemas until he enrolled at the Academy of Drama and Film in 1952.

Kovács always had a gleam in his eyes when he spoke about his mentor, György Illés.

"György never allowed us to touch a camera during the first year," he said. "Instead, we drew charcoal portraits and learned about shapes, light, darkness, tones and textures. We also studied music, literature, architecture, painting and the history of art."

Illés also opened a window to the outside world. When no communist officials were around, he encouraged students to watch classic Western world movies stored in the school's archives. Kovács had particularly vivid memories of seeing *Citizen Kane*.



**From left to right: Vilmos Zsigmond, Michael Moore, Adrienne Papp**